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Wednesday, June 27, 2007

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Suspicious death investigated; 'person of interest' in homicide probe commits suicide

GAYLORD — Four days after police began an investigation into the suspicious death of a 2-year-old girl, a 24-year-old Gaylord man, described as “a person of interest” by Gaylord City Police Chief Joe FitzGerald, allegedly died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound Tuesday morning at a Hayes Township residence.

At a Wednesday news conference, FitzGerald said Thomas Harold Gardner, the boyfriend of the girl's mother, shot himself around 7:45 a.m., approximately one hour before he was to meet with investigators at the office of a Gaylord attorney he had retained.

Investigators from the city police responded to a 9-1-1 dispatch call Thursday, around 6:50 a.m. from the mother of Ella Rylin Westcott, who died from undisclosed injuries at a residence at 126 S. Illinois Ave. A Wednesday obituary notice for Westcott in the Herald Times reported the girl is the daughter of Crystal (Carlson) Westcott and Michael Westcott.

FitzGerald said preliminary findings by the city police and the Gaylord Michigan State Police (MSP) post, who are assisting in the investigation, indicated that foul play may have been involved and the death of Westcott was being investigated as a homicide.

Gardner and Westcott's mother are reported to have been living at the South Illinois Avenue residence. Other than Gardner, Westcott, and her mother, who FitzGerald declined to identify, it was not known if any other children or adults lived at the residence.

FitzGerald acknowledged the little girl had reportedly taken a fall from some stairs two or three days prior to her death but could not comment on whether the fall had contributed to her death. An autopsy was conducted on Ella Westcott Friday in Lansing. FitzGerald said they are awaiting final results from pathologists to determine the cause of her death.

At this time it is not known if the little girl was still alive when police and the Otsego County EMS/Rescue responded to the residence Thursday morning.

The MSP post is investigating the death of Gardner, which FitzGerald said is independent of the city police investigation into the death of Westcott.

“We have not closed this investigation by any means. I think we have given you everything at this time,” FitzGerald said at Wednesday's news conference.

A funeral was held Monday at Nelson Funeral Home for Ella Westcott.

See Saturday's edition of the Herald Times for more on this story.



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published June 26, 2007

Related content from LSJ:

- [Schneider: Mother's tragedy a 'wake-up call'](#)
- [Schneider: Family of daughter with disabilities shares story](#)

Copy of letter from parents of daughter with disabilities

Lansing State Journal

For nearly 30 years, Kermit and Debra Douse of Nashville have cared for their daughter, Marina, who has severe mental and physical disabilities. For them, the shooting deaths last week of Glee and April Bengel, who lived near St. Johns, hit close to home. April had Down Syndrome. According to police, Glee, sick with cancer and fearful that nobody would take care of April, shot the girl to death, then killed herself. In a poignant, eloquent e-mail to columnist John Schneider, the Douses tell their own story and urge people not to judge Glee Bengel too harshly.

No doubt many readers of the LSJ were alarmed, disgusted or at least bewildered by the tragic deaths of the Bengels this past week. While on the surface it may seem a senseless and immoral act – and the taking of a person's life is most certainly a cruel and selfish end – but obviously no one knew this poor woman's mind-set.

A family who has never experienced the pain of a disabled offspring cannot begin to fathom the ramifications of the life changes that it can bring.

My wife and I noticed that we had somewhat similar circumstances to yours while reading your columns many years ago. Our daughter, Marina, was born severely mentally and physically disabled in 1977. It was several years of discovery before we finally accepted the reality and understood the magnitude of her impairments. Her abilities are stunted at the age level of an infant. She has no speech, and is severely hearing impaired.

These roadblocks along with deformed lower arms and Autistic traits have kept the geneticists confused. They have never been able to find others with her distinct characteristics, and this makes her pretty much "one of a kind."

We, (my wife shares the largest portion while I work), bathe, diaper, feed and care for her as anyone would an infant child, and have done so daily for the past 29 – soon to be 30 years.

Personally, we are long past any point of salvaging a normal social life for ourselves. At first, when we were young, we took her with us. You need understanding, accepting friends who don't mind the occasional in depth physical problems that need to be addressed while you are visiting. You tell yourself that you can balance this and it works OK for the first five..... then ten..... And let's even stretch that into fifteen years. Finally fatigue sets in and you decide that it is far easier and less stressful to just stay home. Our daughter has always been our #1 priority, and you put away your own dreams of what your future was going to be, and focus on more important demands. Our calling in life is to love her, keep her clean, well fed, healthy and happy. Along the way, I have voluntarily resigned from good positions that were eating up far too many of the hours I needed to be at home.

The 60 + hour work week just does not fit into our family plan anymore.

There are few respite centers and quality people to care for the disabled. You must rely on the recommendations of trustworthy friends for home care. We, of course, are unwilling to leave her with just anyone. Long periods of time can become expensive and she is never off of our minds even when we manage those few outings. It takes a very special person to think and care for her. One must actually put themselves in her position and be aware of things as simple as, "she must be thirsty, because I am." Forgetting just the occasional drink of water can lead to dehydration. If she cries, does she have a headache? Maybe she has a persistent itch that she cannot scratch? Was she stung by a bee? Her distress could be one of hundreds of surface problems or things that run deeper. They must all be ruled out and looked into.

These things and countless more are the things we encounter daily, and as we grow older, we wonder how in the world will this all be managed if we were taken out of her life?

The Government looks at places to cut almost daily now. The situation is most certainly going to get worse. Where are the easiest cutbacks? From people who won't – or can't – complain. Where do you find compassionate, caring workers and trustworthy foster homes that will give 24 hr care, facing unpleasant bodily functions for \$7/hour? With all the cutbacks, who checks into these worker's backgrounds? Who can supervise and ensure that there is no abuse, when this person cannot speak on their own behalf? Unless you can find marks on the body, it is difficult to identify abusive living situations.

We have a son who was a very understanding and caring brother while at home. Now he and his wife both work full time, and have two children of their own. While he would always check on her in a foster situation, no one can assure quality care from a distance. His family deserves his full attention as they develop – something that was always difficult for us to give him as we cared for his sister.

Extended family is hardly a choice, as most people barely acknowledge her presence even when she is in the same room with them. In our society it is difficult for most people to interact with the disabled, let alone care for them. It makes them "uncomfortable", therefore it is easier to ignore them.

So, as we read the story of the Bengel family, I cannot condone the actions, but I understand the loneliness and despair of people that may not have had the same strength or blessings that my wife and I have had. No one can judge the quality of life of another person. Mrs. Bengel's daughter seemed to be trainable, friendly and apparently able to manage daily tasks. What a shame for her life to end by such means. As for Mrs. Bengel, she obviously felt that there was no where to turn.

This should be a wake-up call to all compassionate people and agencies to come forward. But with recent cutbacks and more to come, who can predict anything other than negative situations for the people who can't even exist in an "assisted living" situation?

People like us need to know the "where's and how's" in terms of quality care for our loved ones.

One could hope that the readers of this story could understand the dilemma and reach out to people in these situations..... But my guess is that most people glanced at the story at best, shaking their heads in disgust. After all, Paris Hilton will soon be out of jail, or they probably have vacations to plan, cocktail parties to attend, and golf courses to visit. This is not their problem, it's ours.



Mom gets 1 year for abuse

Disabled daughter found malnourished

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

By Paul Janczewski

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FLINT -A Flint mother was sentenced to 3 years' probation and 1 year in jail for abusing her disabled daughter.

Theresa E. Terrell, 44, also was ordered by Genesee Circuit Judge Richard B. Yuille to complete substance abuse and mental health treatment and serve an unspecified term on tether.

Terrell had earlier pleaded no contest to second-degree abuse of a vulnerable adult, a 4-year felony.

She had no comment to Yuille before sentencing.

Yuille called it a "disturbing, troubling" case.

On Dec. 14, Flint police found the disabled woman, then 22, on a mattress stained with urine and feces in her mother's home on N. Grand Traverse near W. First Avenue. She weighed 43 pounds.

Officials said she was malnourished and was clothed in several soiled diapers and a T-shirt.

Police went to the residence about 9:30 p.m. looking for a man sought in an unrelated assault complaint when an overwhelming odor led them to a bedroom where the woman was found. A number of toilet bowl fresheners had been hung about the room to try to mask the stench, police said.

Officials say they believe she had been lying there for weeks and had not seen a doctor in about a year.

Officials said the daughter has cerebral palsy, a neurological disorder that affects body movement and muscle coordination.

The woman was removed from her mother's home and hospitalized.

Officials said the victim is now living with her father and is attending a school program for the developmentally and physically disabled.

The woman also has gained weight and is able to walk with crutches.

Terrell was recently determined competent for trial after an examination at the Center for Forensic Psychiatry near Ann Arbor.

Her attorney, Neil C. Szabo, sent her there after learning Terrell had been under psychiatric care in the past.

He said she saw a psychiatrist in Ohio because of the death of the victim's twin brother; both were reportedly born prematurely on March 21, 1984.

Terrell told police the boy died six days after birth.

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Families relieved by verdict in molestation case

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Every day for the past week, a Grand Rapids father has attended the trial of a former music teacher accused of molesting his young son.

And every day when he has come home, the boy has asked his father the same question: "Is he in jail now?"

On Tuesday, the father was able to give the answer his son has wanted to hear. "Today, I can tell him, 'Yeah, he isn't getting out.' "

A Kent County Circuit Court jury deliberated less than seven hours before coming back with guilty verdicts against Ronald Taylor on 12 counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct against nine boys 10 and younger. The jury acquitted Taylor on three of the counts.

The 38-year-old man got to know the boys while teaching at Grand Rapids' Martin Luther King Jr. Learning Academy and Buchanan Elementary School. He gained their parents' trust, testimony showed, and took the boys to church at Rockford's Blythefield Hills Baptist Church, where Taylor was a lifelong member.

The father, who spoke after Tuesday's verdict, said he wondered about an unmarried man with a house full of toys who always seemed to want to be around the boys.

"I should have listened to my first instinct and cut off all contact," the father said, adding that he will never trust someone like that again when it comes to his child. "I felt like I let him down."

His son was one of 10 boys who appeared before a packed courtroom and told their stories of liking "Mr. Taylor," thinking he was fun, but also saying he touched their genitals or buttocks.

Sometimes, he would do it under the guise of adjusting a zipper or belt, they said, asking some if they felt a mouse tickling them.

Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Kevin Bramble had no physical evidence, and instead had to rely on the sometimes-shifting perception of children to provide testimony, along with their parents and the testimony of a fellow jail inmate who said Taylor had given him a graphic account of the acts.

Defense attorney Fil Iorio was left to try to dismantle the victims' testimony. He presented character witnesses for his client, and brought in a psychologist who testified that children can and do lie about such things.

Iorio said an appeal of the verdict is likely based on the inconsistent testimony of the children.

After the verdict, Taylor's family and friends were stunned.

Alice Taylor sat in a conference room, her head in her hands as she wept about her son's fate.

"My son's innocent. He's always been innocent," said Ronald Taylor, Sr. "There's a greater power in this, and it's going to override everything."

The victims' families, by contrast, were ecstatic. After a week of trial, there were hugs and joyous jumping and shouts of "Praise Jesus" outside the courtroom.

"I am overjoyed by the verdict," said the mother of twin boys who testified that they had been molested more than once by Taylor. She said even though one of the charges involving her 7-year-old son had been dismissed by the jury, she feels the system worked.

A 6-year-old victim sat smiling next to his grandmother. "I'm glad he's going to jail," he said.

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Former school security guard sentenced in decade-long imprisonment of teen

June 26, 2007

By DAN NEPHIN

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH — A former school security guard accused of keeping a teenage runaway in his home for a decade and having sex with her pleaded guilty Tuesday and was sentenced to five to 15 years in prison.

Thomas John Hose, 49, took in the 14-year-old girl and kept her from leaving the tiny home he shared with his parents and son, prosecutors said. Tanya Nicole Kach, now 25, has said the two regularly had sex during her captivity.

He pleaded guilty to all counts just as his trial was about to start.

Hose, of McKeesport, had been a security guard at Kach's school, and Kach went to live with him in February 1996. She has said she had a crush on him.

In recent years, Kach said she had been allowed out occasionally. Last March, she revealed her identity as a runaway to a deli owner she had befriended, leading to Hose's arrest in March 2006.

The Associated Press normally does not name victims of suspected sex crimes, but Kach has spoken with reporters about her experience. Kach, who approved of the plea, did not speak to the media after leaving court.

During the hearing, Kach read a letter to Hose, her voice faltering and her eyes welling with tears.

"I just want to know why you did what you did to me for 10 years. Why?" Kach asked.

Hose took away her innocence and made her feel as though no one loved her, she said.

"It's so sad to say, but I was a puppet, nothing but a puppet," she said, saying Hose controlled what she wore and ate and even how she styled her hair. "I'm not that dominated puppet anymore."

She said he repeatedly told her: "Oh, you're just a pretty face. You're so stupid, you'd be nothing without me."

Hose apologized: "Only God knows how sorry I truly am."

But he also said Kach repeatedly told him: "Thank you, because without you, I'd be dead or in the streets."

Hose's comments drew a rebuke from Allegheny County Judge John Zottola: "I think, Mr. Hose, you give yourself too much credit."

Kach is in therapy but has finished her first semester of college and is volunteering at a senior home, said Lawrence Fisher, her attorney in a civil case against Hose.

Hose's attorney, Jim Ecker, said he was pleased with the outcome, noting that Hose could have faced more than 100 years in prison.

Ecker said he hoped Hose would get the help he needs in prison. "He's a very high risk for suicide, a very, very depressed kind of person," the lawyer said.

Hose's trial had been scheduled to begin Tuesday, but instead he pleaded guilty to statutory sexual assault, three counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, two counts of indecent assault and one count each of endangering the welfare of children, corruption of a minor, interference with custody of children and aggravated indecent assault. He was not charged with kidnapping.

Also on Tuesday, a beautician accused of helping Kach run away by changing her looks pleaded no contest.

Judith Sokol, 59, of Duquesne, pleaded no contest to statutory sexual assault, interference with the custody of a minor, endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of minors. Sokol was not accused of direct sexual behavior, but prosecutors said she was an accomplice because she gave Hose and Kach a place to have sex.

Kach has sued Hose, Sokol, McKeesport and others in federal court. Her attorney in that lawsuit, Lawrence Fisher, said Kach was relieved to have the criminal case behind her.

While Kach may have run away, Fisher said she "almost immediately" found herself unable to leave. "When she attempted to leave, she was threatened with her life," he said.

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Column: Is child care worth more to kids -- or budget-cutters?

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

By Sharon Emery

A couple-dozen crucial cogs in the state's business and economic policy wheel showed up at a recent hearing on the 2008 state budget.

While such a contingent generally draws the rapt attention of lawmakers, this group's attire -- T-shirts that formed a kelly-green block in the audience at the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services -- signaled they weren't taking that for granted.

Smart move, since they've been overlooked in the past.

How overlooked? Well, it's been 11 years -- longer than similar workers in any other state, they say -- since they got a raise from Michigan taxpayers.

But not so overlooked that lawmakers didn't finger them for cuts in a budget that is at least \$1.6 billion short.

So came members of the Child Care Providers Together Michigan union, which represents 40,000 in-home child-care providers statewide. They tend to 200,000 Michigan children whose low-income working parents qualify for state-subsidized child care.

The Michigan Senate wants to save \$27 million by cutting back the number of child-care hours the state will help those families cover from 50 to 45 per week.

The union was formed in December with the backing of the United Auto Workers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Workers. Union representatives say they want to improve child care by providing workers with better wages, and health care and vacation benefits.

Pamela Stewart of Benton Harbor, a 29-year veteran of the profession whose home is licensed for 12 children, told lawmakers that when she started in 1979, her state payment was \$1.50 an hour. Now it's \$1.95.

Hmm, do we have a problem?

Only if you're a working parent trying to find quality child care.

Only if you're a state trying to keep more former welfare moms on the job so you don't get whacked financially by the federal government.

Only if you're a lawmaker representing taxpayers who want to help boost the economy.

"Without child-care providers our communities would suffer," Stewart said, " ... businesses would be unable to operate efficiently."

If that sounds like an overstatement, you haven't experienced the panic attack induced by a screaming baby, an ailing child-care provider and a boss tapping his foot back at the office.

Stewart said she often works for free when parents exceed the 50-hour limit but can't afford to pay what she charges without state help.

"They feel bad that they can't pay," she said. "But then you see those babies in their arms and the dad left, and they're trying to do the right thing by working, and you just feel sorry for them."

The average weekly cost of child care in Michigan is \$126 per child (\$3.15 an hour in a 40-hour week),

according to the Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) Association, which helps train child-care workers and refers parents to them.

The group also administers the ChildCare Commitment program, which provides grants covering 40 percent of licensed child-care costs for low-income parents who don't qualify for state subsidies. (Grant applications are at www.mi4c.org.)

Funding for the grants comes from the Women's Caring Program, a nonprofit group that last July raised almost a quarter-million during its 27th annual Twilight Gathering fundraiser in Milford. This year's fundraiser is set for July 12; see www.womenscaringprogram.org for details.

Some 120 families receive the grants, but 314 more are on the waiting list, according to Mark Sullivan, 4C director.

He said lousy pay is just one of the factors contributing to the declining number of licensed child-care homes and centers operating in Michigan. About 100 people leave the business each month, he said.

"Michigan works when child care works," Sullivan said simply. "Over 60 percent of parents with children under the age of 5 are in the work force, so it's extremely important for parents and employers that Michigan has a system that works."

Now we just have to decide what that's worth.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

State must find way to generate more revenue

Tuesday, June 26, 2007

By Dale R. Hein

One of the criteria for judging a quality community is the way that community treats its most vulnerable citizens. As Michigan's budget crisis grows, those who are suffering and will continue to suffer as a result are the poor, the disabled and the disenfranchised of all ages.

In Kalamazoo County, the leaders of the major service providers, including schools and human services, meet regularly to look at ways to deliver consolidated, coordinated and efficient services and address the community's most critical needs. The organization is the Multi-Purpose Collaborative Body. The MPCB is united in its position related to the budget crisis in Michigan.

New revenues have to be generated. There needs to be a logical combination of cuts and new taxes to address Michigan's structural deficit. To advocate exclusively for budget cuts as a way to solve the problem will only serve to impoverish the community and the state even more. Excessive partisanship has replaced compromise and problem-solving in Lansing.

Consider the following examples: 12 percent of Kalamazoo County citizens live in poverty. One half of those individuals cannot afford to see a doctor. One half of them cannot afford needed medicine. 65 percent of low-income residents in the county needed to see a dentist in 2006 but could not afford to. Among Kalamazoo County residents with household incomes less than \$20,000 in 2004, more than one-third did not have health insurance. Forty percent of those in poverty could not pay their rent sometime during the past year. One-third of those individuals had their utilities turned off during the year because of failure to pay.

Seniors relying on Medicaid have less opportunity to be served in their homes for long-term care needs, making nursing home placement their only alternative and a much more expensive option.

The Department of Human Services in Kalamazoo County investigated more than 2,200 child abuse complaints in 2006. One in seven Kalamazoo County residents are on Medicaid. One in nine receives food assistance. One-quarter of the renters in Kalamazoo County live below the poverty level. This is coupled with the fact that, over the last seven years, there has been a 25-30 percent reduction in DHS staffing.

State funding cuts will reduce the number of Head Start classrooms and the number of children served. Family and Children Services, a Kalamazoo County based non-profit service organization, serves more than 4,000 children who suffer from emotional problems or who have been abused or neglected. State cuts condemn these children to worsening conditions and a future without hope. The need grows while the capacity to deal with that need diminishes.

The governor has presented a plan that includes a combination of spending cuts, government reform and tax increases to address the state's crisis. While the specific components of the plan can be debated, excluding new revenue generation for purely ideological reasons is not responsible government.

Michigan needs to protect its citizens, build for the future, and fairly spread the burden of economic recovery. Michigan is not a high tax state. Our state and local taxes are below the national average.

Those businesses considering moving to Michigan want a viable infrastructure to support their workforce. They want quality schools as well as safe and healthy communities. Communities where this infrastructure has been cut away will simply not attract business and support growth. The organizations that comprise the MPCB strongly urge our local legislators to support a sensible, balanced solution to our crisis. It is time for courage and leadership in Lansing. We urge our state leaders to demonstrate both.

Dale R. Hein chairs the Kalamazoo County Multi-Purpose Collaborative Body.

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News Release

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DHS launches Web site for foster youths headed to adulthood

June 27, 2007

LANSING – Foster youths aging out of care are just a click away from services and support as they transition to self-sufficiency, Department of Human Services officials announced today.

A new Web site, www.michigan.gov/fyit, offers information on a variety of issues and resources important to current and former foster youths, including housing, education, legal assistance, transportation, financial management, health and more. The site is the result of recommendations made by the Statewide Task Force on Youth Transitioning from Foster Care in 2006 and included input from foster youths.

"This Web site was at the very top of the task force's recommendations and I'm delighted it has been accomplished," DHS Director Marianne Udow said. "The site provides a helping hand to foster youths everywhere, whether it's help in finding a home, tips for managing money, applying for college financial aid or seeking medical care."

In 2006, 536 Michigan youths left foster care, or "aged out," and research shows they are at greater risk for poverty, homelessness, unemployment and other negative outcomes. As part of the Michigan Youth Opportunities Initiative, youth boards representing 30 Michigan counties have been formed to help change these outcomes and provide financial support to foster youths in transition. Members of the youth boards are charged with maintaining the Web site to provide updated information.

Jen Leedy, 20, spent eight years in foster care before aging out recently. Enrolled at Macomb Community College with a major in communications, Leedy serves as vice president of the youth board in her county and helped provide feedback on the Web site during its development.

"We provided a lot of suggestions about what information would be interesting to people of our age, what would be useful and what would catch our eye," Leedy said. "This site makes it so easy to find all the information instead of searching through Google or all the other sites. I hope more states do the same thing."

Michigan's efforts to improve supports for foster youths aging out have attracted national attention, including the National Governors Association and the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care.

"It is a myth to assume a child of 18, who may still be enrolled in high school, is ready for independence," Udow said. "While a Web site cannot provide food, clothing and a secure home, it can help foster youths connect with a caring adult and locate resources to help them transition to adulthood."

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs or www.michigan.gov/fyit



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Dog complaints aired in front of city commission

Published Tuesday, June 26, 2007 3:52:07 PM Central Time

By **RALPH ANSAMI**

Globe News Editor

IRONWOOD -- Neighbors of 206 W. Ridge St. again complained about animal problems originating from the house to the city commission Monday, but the situation is much worse than that.

Kitty Colassaco said dog feces on neighbor's yards remains a big issue.

"The family has tried to respond to our concerns," she conceded, referring to issues that were brought up at the previous commission meeting.

Colassaco said the neighbors would try to help the residents of 206 W. Ridge to at least mow the lawn.

"It's really about caring about a whole neighborhood," she said, adding that the problem has been escalating for five years. "There are issues here that must be dealt with," she said.

Frank Richmond, who lives at 206 W. Ridge St., appeared at the meeting and said an unidentified neighbor threatened his life. He said public safety officers responded to a complaint about animals there and "wrote it down as a friendly visit."

A public safety department officer who visited the house on Friday along with a Department of Human Services employee gave it a failing grade, however.

Sgt. Ron Carpenedo said there were at least four people living in the house, which was dirty and smelled bad, with animal feces on the floor.

The front room baseboard was covered in animal hair six to eight inches thick, Carpenedo

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estimated.

Two women in the house had feet that were black on the top and bottom and covered with matted animal hair. It appeared as if some people in the house hadn't changed clothing for quite some time, Carpenedo said, and there were hair balls hanging from their clothing.

Seven dogs and seven cats were living in the house.

The report following the visit indicated medical problems among the residents were a factor in the squalid living conditions. One woman in the house was quoted as saying, "I can't do this anymore."

Carpenedo's report added that an elderly man living in the house agreed it was "dirty and smelly."

Carpenedo, a veteran of the department, was called by the DHS to assist in assessing conditions at the home. His determination was that the home is unfit for both the people and animals living there.

Mayor Bruce Noren said Monday, "The public safety department made visits there and will apply the law appropriately."

Public safety department director Bob Erspamer didn't mention Carpenedo's visit, but said, "There's other issues and departments involved."

Commissioner John Kasieta asked if health department might be involved. Erspamer said it is.

Members of the public and commissioners debated whether city ordinances have enough teeth to tackle the animal control issues involved.

"We ought to learn from these experiences," Noren said.

City attorney A. Dennis Cossi said individuals in the neighborhood have the option of taking their complaints to the court, if they feel that's the best way to proceed.

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Rise in Child Chronic Illness Could Swamp Health Care

By E.J. Mundell, *HealthDay Reporter*

TUESDAY, June 26 (HealthDay News) -- As more American children eat poorly and exercise less, rates of chronic illness such as asthma and diabetes are continuing to rise, researchers are reporting.

And because childhood illness often sets the stage for adult health woes, the U.S. health-care system could be headed toward a crisis in coming decades, experts warn in a number of reports in the June 27 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

"A chronic condition in a child will become a chronic condition in an adult -- we just know that. And what you're talking about for an adult is maybe 10, 20 years of suffering. But with a child, you're talking about maybe 50, 60 years of suffering," said the journal's editor-in-chief, pediatrician Dr. Catherine DeAngelis, during a Tuesday teleconference.

A surge in childhood illness will also have a big impact on the U.S. health-care system, another expert said.

"Given these high rates of [ill children] in the next decade, there are going to be tremendously higher rates of expenditures for health care and social welfare, because a lot of these people will have health disabilities, and they won't be employable," Dr. James Perrin, director of the Center for Child and Adolescent Health Policy at MassGeneral Hospital for Children, in Boston, told *HealthDay*. Perrin is also co-author of a journal analysis of the prevalence and causes of childhood chronic illness.

The special themed issue of *JAMA* is devoted to chronic childhood illness, defined as any debilitating illness that lasts a year or more past diagnosis. A number of new studies suggest that, in many ways, the health of America's children is getting worse, not better.

Some findings:

- According to the analysis by Perrin and colleagues, more than 7 percent of U.S. children and youth were hampered in their daily activities by an illness that lasted three months or longer in 2004, compared to just 1.8 percent of children in 1960.
- Chronic conditions now affect 15 percent to 18 percent of children and teens, and even those estimates may not fully account for obesity and mental health woes, the Harvard team said.
- The "big three" chronic health conditions for kids are obesity, which affected 5 percent of American children in the early 1970s but 18 percent of children today; asthma (9 percent prevalence, nearly double from the 1980s), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (a dramatic rise, mostly linked to better diagnosis).

Childhood diabetes is one of the prime results of rising obesity rates, which in turn result from more sedentary behaviors and poor diets.

"Children's environments have really changed a lot in the last 30 to 40 years," said Perrin. "By that, we mean a big change in their diets -- much more fast-food, high-calorie foods -- and major changes in their use of electronic media, especially television. They are spending much more time in the home watching television and eating high-calorie foods while they do so."

However, new research finds that the rise in childhood diabetes is still largely attributed to an increase in type 1 disease -- usually thought of as an inherited illness -- rather than an increase in obesity-linked type 2 disease, the form that typically strikes obese adults.

Experts aren't sure why type 1 diabetes numbers might be rising. Some experts believe that

obesity might help spur certain immune-cell changes that are seen in type 1 disease, changes that eventually lead to the destruction of insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. Or, as Dr. Rebecca Lipton of the University of Chicago noted in an editorial, many of these type 1 cases may be type 2 cases misdiagnosed by physicians.

Diabetes does seem to be affecting different groups of American children in different ways, however.

"We have seen an increase in type 1 diabetes over a 27-year period of about 60 percent. This translates into 2.7 percent higher annual rates for non-Hispanic white children and about 1.6 percent higher annual rates for Hispanics," said Dr. Dana Dabelea, of the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, and lead author of the country-wide SEARCH for Diabetes in Youth study group.

"Based on these data, we estimate that 15,000 youth are diagnosed annually with type 1 diabetes in the United States," she said.

As for type 2 diabetes, Dabelea said that form of the disease "accounts for 1 to 2 percent of cases in Caucasian children [in Europe], whereas here in the United States, this figure is 15 percent. That figure speaks for itself... It's a deleterious consequence of obesity in this country."

In their journal study, the researchers at University of Colorado Health Sciences Center found that non-Hispanic white children are more likely to develop type 1 diabetes than minority children. On the other hand, type 2 disease is much more likely to appear in black or Hispanic 15- to 19-year-olds than in white teens.

Asthma, too, is affecting more and more children, and childhoods spent largely indoors may be to blame here, as well, said Perrin, who is also a professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School.

While allergies to cockroaches and dust mites have long been linked to soaring asthma rates among America's urban poor, studies have shown no concurrent rise in the rate of household infestations over the past decades, he pointed out.

"However, we do know that kids now spend much more time indoors [than they used to] in intimate contact with cockroaches and dust mites," Perrin said.

Even the good news on childhood illness comes mixed with a little bad news. Dutch researchers note that more and more children are claiming victory over a wide variety of cancers. However, the study also suggests that battling cancer in childhood boosts risks for adult illnesses.

The study of almost 1,400 five-year survivors of childhood cancer tracked these young people to an average of just over 24 years of age. Three-quarters of these survivors experienced some form of adverse medical event in young adulthood, and one-quarter suffered five or more such events, the researchers found. More than one-third (36.8 percent) developed a life-threatening or disabling disorder years after beating their cancer, the researchers found.

Study author Dr. Huib Caron, of Emma Children's Hospital/Academic Medical Center, in Amsterdam, strongly supports the creation of specialized follow-up clinics that could monitor childhood cancer survivors into adulthood.

These clinics are essential because "the majority of adult medicine physicians haven't got the faintest clue about the health risks that this population is running -- they haven't got the expertise," Caron said. And many problems, such as cardiac troubles, are asymptomatic and would only show up on doctor-ordered ultrasounds or other tests, he said.

Getting doctors to keep closer tabs on childhood cancer survivors might not be so difficult. However, changing the poor eating habits and lax exercise patterns of America's children -- and their parents -- will be a *lot* tougher, Perrin said.

Recent public policy moves -- such as bans on sugary or greasy snacks and soft drinks in schools -- are steps in the right direction. But parents, especially, "are critical to this effort," Perrin said.

By modeling good behaviors and closely monitoring their children's behaviors, "parents can do a really good job, and it's important for them to realize that," he said. "We think that improving how parents parent is a critical way of stemming this epidemic."

More information

Find out more on keeping kids healthy at the [American Heart Association](#).

SOURCES: James Perrin, M.D., director, Center for Child and Adolescent Health Policy, MassGeneral Hospital for Children, and professor, pediatrics, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston; June 26, 2007, news teleconference with Catherine DeAngelis, M.D., editor in chief, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Boston; Dana Dabelea, M.D., Ph.D., University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Denver; Huib Caron M.D., Ph.D., Emma Children's Hospital/Academic Medical Center, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; June 27, 2007, *Journal of the American Medical Association*

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First big wave of Iraqi refugees heads for the US



By Dan Murphy, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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Adnan Abbas – with his poor English, four young daughters, and little money to speak of – shrugs when told that making a new life in the US will be hard.

"I know that a new country, new language, is difficult and that America isn't going to say, 'Welcome, Adnan, here's a million dollars,' " he says. "But life in Iraq? That's impossible. We're one of the luckiest families in the world."

On Tuesday, the Abbas family will take their five small suitcases, close the door on the small flat they've rented for the past year in Amman, Jordan, and start a journey that will eventually taken them to Lansing, Mich. They are in the vanguard of what's likely to become – if the history of American wars is anything to go by – the latest wave of immigrants to have an impact on the demographics of the US.

In February, the US agreed to accept 7,000 Iraqi refugees this year, a large jump over the fewer than 700 Iraqis accepted by the US in the first three years of the war but a drop in the ocean when measured against the estimated 2 million Iraqis who have fled the country since the war began. About 2,000 of those Iraqis coming this year, say refugee officials, will start their lives anew in Michigan.

For now, the Abbases are among the exceptions that prove the rule. Adnan, a driver in Baghdad for this paper, was witness to the murder of Allan Enwiyah and the kidnapping of reporter Jill Carroll in January 2006.

The family fled the country because of fear of reprisals from the Iraqi jihadis who had murdered Mr. Enwiyah, and because Abbas had been publicly identified as connected to an American organization, something that has proven a death sentence for hundreds of Iraqis in the past four years.

One of Abbas's brothers was murdered at his small shop in Baghdad earlier this year, and witnesses said the masked killers shouted "Where's Adnan?" before pulling the trigger. A nephew on his wife's side of the family was murdered in 2005 after being kidnapped while delivering supplies to a US base in Anbar Province. His killing was filmed and posted on the Internet.

The Monitor's efforts to secure immigrant status for the family, and the simple fact that he had some American ties, helped move the family to the front of the line of those seeking entry to the US. Interviews with other refugees in Jordan made it clear that most heading for America now either have ties to the country through family, or because of their work in Iraq.

This week dozens of other Iraqis will be joining the Abbases on their journey to the US, after months of delays vetting their applications and creating processing mechanisms. A spokeswoman for the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Amman says she wasn't certain how many Iraqis had already gone to the US this year, but said that the vast majority of arrivals will be during the next six months. About 2,000 of the Iraqis coming this year, say refugee officials, will start their lives anew in Michigan.

While 7,000 remains tiny when measured against the US population and human need, the history of war-driven immigration to the US is that it is generally backloaded: The US accepted only about 600 refugees from Vietnam between 1954 and 1974. The floodgates opened after the fall of Saigon, with the first wave composed largely of Vietnamese who had worked with Americans in that country.

By the 1980 census there were 245,000 Vietnamese living in America, and that number had grown to 614,000 by 1990. The second wave was fed by the exodus of boat people fleeing communist rule and reeducation camps.

Though there are 3.5 million Arab-Americans now, according to an estimate by the Arab American Institute, the 2000 census counted 1.3 million and of those only 38,000 identified themselves as "Iraqi." What's more, 63 percent of Arab-Americans are

Christians, reflecting decades of migration from Levantine countries such as Lebanon.

Though it's still easier for Iraqi Christians to get into the US because of family ties, and the estimated 1 million Iraqi Christians are disproportionately represented among refugees, they still make up, at most, 5 percent of Iraq's population. So if the United States does decide to take in a large number of Iraqis, the traditional Christian tilt of Arab Americans will be substantially shifted.

While a defeat like the one the US and its south Vietnamese allies suffered in that war is unlikely in Iraq, US military commanders, including Gen. David Petraeus, have estimated the fight there could last another decade. In addition to the 2 million Iraqis living in limbo, mostly in Syria and Jordan, the UN estimates another 2 million Iraqis have been internally displaced.

So far, the Iraqis have had few options. One of the major recipients of refugees since the war began has been Sweden, which accepted 9,000 Iraqis last year. This year, Sweden's migration minister estimates 20,000 will be accepted. But people working on refugee issues in the region say there's a dawning awareness that what was at first thought to be a temporary problem now needs durable solutions. "At the start of the war, there was still this notion that most of those who'd left Iraq would eventually be returning home," says Rana Sweis, a spokeswoman for the UNHCR in Amman. "But it's become clear that we need to face reality." A member of another group who works with Iraqi refugees, who asked not be named said: "It's never as fast as you'd like, and the US is so far doing very little to open its doors. But is it getting faster? Yes."

For the moment, the vast majority of Iraqi refugees have yet to register with the UNHCR, the first step in legal immigration to a third country, if they make a convincing case they would face reprisals if they return home. In Jordan, only about 33,000 are registered and in Syria, which is host to 1.4 million Iraqi refugees, just 89,000 have registered. But the pace of registrations is surging. On a typical day last week, about 200 Iraqis lined up outside UNHCR's Amman office to begin the process.

Accepting refugees isn't as simple as giving them a visa. Families coming to the US receive free plane tickets and a living stipend while they get on their feet, but they're expected to start paying this money back once they get a job. In all, the US spends about \$800 million a year on refugees, though much of this is to improve living conditions in refugee camps overseas. The US will accept 70,000 refugees in total this year.

For now, the Abbas family is apprehensive about what lies ahead, but are glad to be getting out of Jordan. "I can't work here; we can't become Jordanian citizens, so it's a relief to get away and start rebuilding," says Abbas. His biggest worry is his wife, who doesn't speak English. "She's like a tree with her roots in Baghdad, and we've pulled up the roots."

The family is receiving a small fund of money provided by Monitor readers but left behind a Baghdad home and land that Abbas doubts they'll ever be able to sell. For her part, Mrs. Abbasis worried about school for their 12, 11, and 6-year old daughters: Will they fall behind until they learn English? Will Suzanne, almost a year old and born in Jordan, ever learn Arabic? The family is also a little worried about the reputed frigid Michigan winters – all accept for 6-year old Manar: "I'll be able to make snowballs and throw them at my sisters," she says with a giggle.